



MEDIA ADVISORY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CALTRANS REMEMBERS ITS FALLEN, URGES SAFETY AT ANNUAL WORKERS' MEMORIAL EVENT

LOS ANGELES – California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) employees, family members and guests took a moment to recognize and remember District 7 workers killed in the line of duty at its annual Workers' Memorial event.

Statewide, Caltrans has lost 187 employees since 1921; 37 of those employees worked in District 7, which covers Los Angeles and Ventura counties. Highway construction and maintenance work is one of the most dangerous occupations in the United States. In 2014, there were 4,783 work zone collisions on California state highways, resulting in 2,391 injuries and 43 fatalities.

The last District 7 fatality occurred on September 1, 2016, when Jorge Lopez was killed after being struck by an errant big rig on State Route 14 near Palmdale. Lopez was an electrician and a 16-year Caltrans veteran.

"The men and women who build, repair, and maintain the state's 50,000 lane miles of state highway know that they have one of the most dangerous jobs in America," said Caltrans District 7 Director Carrie Bowen. "The only line of defense are the closures we install to warn motorists of a work zone. However, these are not foolproof in protecting workers from an errant or distracted driver."

In addition to the danger workers face, an estimated 85 percent of people who are killed in highway work zones are drivers and passengers. Most of these fatalities are caused by rear-end collisions, with speeding, distracted, and aggressive driving the most common causes. These numbers don't include the close calls, such as the more than 1,000 Caltrans vehicles hit on the highways each year—the equivalent of almost three per day.

"In an effort to keep roadways, work zones and construction areas safe, California Highway Patrol officers throughout the state are always on the lookout for poor and dangerous driving habits," said Southern Division Chief Chris O'Quinn. "I want to remind motorists that life is precious, please watch your speed, put the cell phones down and get to your destination safely."



BE WORK ZONE ALERT



Drivers can dramatically improve safety in work zones by slowing down, avoiding texting and talking on the phone, and complying with the Move Over law, which requires motorists to move over if it is safe to do so or slow down when approaching vehicles displaying flashing amber warning lights, including Caltrans vehicles.



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